

REMARKS

Claims 1-27 are currently pending in the subject application. Claims 15-20, 25 and 26 are withdrawn in connection with the election requirement of January 4, 2006. Independent claims 1 and 8 are amended. Dependent claims 3 and 4 are amended. Dependent claims 2 and 9 are canceled. Claims 1, 3-8, 10-14, 21-24 and 27 are presented to the Examiner for further consideration.

A. Introduction

In the outstanding Office action, the Examiner rejected claims 1 and 5-7 under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b) as being anticipated by U.S. Patent No. 4,672,397 to Suga et al. (hereinafter referred to as "the Suga et al. reference"); rejected claims 2-4, 8, 10, 21-23 and 27 under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over the Suga et al. reference in view of U.S. Patent No. 5,144,340 to Hotomi et al. (hereinafter referred to as "the Hotomi et al. reference"); rejected claim 24 under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over the Suga et al. reference in view of the Hotomi et al. reference and further in view of U.S. Patent No. 6,158,844 to Murakami et al. (hereinafter referred to as "the Murakami et al. reference"); and objected to claims 9 and 11-14, as being dependent upon a rejected base claim, but indicated that they would be allowable if rewritten in independent form including all of the limitations of the base claim and any intervening claims.

B. Asserted Anticipation Rejection of Claims 1 and 5-7

In the outstanding Office action, the Examiner rejected claims 1 and 5-7 under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b) as being anticipated by the Suga et al. reference. Independent claim 1 now incorporates elements from dependent claim 9, indicated as allowable by the Examiner. Accordingly, applicants respectfully request favorable reconsideration and withdrawal of the rejection of independent claim 1 under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b).

Claims 5-7 all ultimately depend upon independent claim 1. Hence, claims 5-7 are allowable as being dependent on an allowable base claim, namely independent claim 1. Accordingly, applicants respectfully request favorable reconsideration and withdrawal of the rejection of claims 5-7 under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b).

C. Asserted Obviousness Rejection of Claims 2-4, 8, 10, 21-23 and 27

In the outstanding Office action, the Examiner rejected claims 2-4, 8, 10, 21-23 and 27 under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over the Suga et al. reference in view of the Hotomi et al. reference.

Independent claim 8 now incorporates elements from dependent claim 9, indicated as allowable by the Examiner. Accordingly, applicants respectfully request favorable reconsideration and withdrawal of the rejection of independent claim 8 under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a).

Claims 3 and 4 all ultimately depend upon independent claim 1. Hence, claims 3 and 4 are allowable as being dependent on an allowable base claim, namely independent claim 1. Claims 10, 21-23, and 27 all depend upon independent claim 8. Hence, claims 10, 21-23, and 27 are allowable as being dependent on an allowable base claim, namely independent claim 8. Accordingly, applicants respectfully request favorable reconsideration and withdrawal of the rejection of claims 2-4, 10, 21-23, and 27 under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a).

D. Asserted Obviousness Rejection of Claim 24

In the outstanding Office action, the Examiner rejected claim 24 under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over the Suga et al. reference in view of the Hotomi et al. reference, and further in view of the Murakami et al. reference.

Claim 24 depends upon independent claim 8. Hence, claim 24 is allowable as being dependent on an allowable base claim, namely independent claim 8. Accordingly, applicants respectfully request favorable reconsideration and withdrawal of the rejection of claim 24 under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a).

E. Allowable Subject Matter

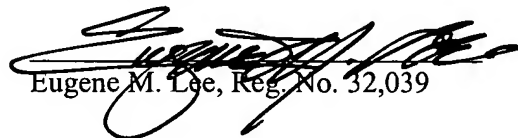
Applicants note with appreciation the Examiner's indication of allowable material in claims 9 and 11-14. Independent claims 1 and 8 now incorporate elements from dependent claim 9. Accordingly, claim 9 has been canceled.

F. Conclusion

In view of the foregoing amendments and remarks, reconsideration of this application is earnestly solicited, and an early and favorable further action upon all the claims is hereby requested. If the Examiner believes that additional discussions or information might advance the prosecution of the instant application, the Examiner is invited to contact the undersigned at the telephone number listed below to expedite resolution of any outstanding issues.

Respectfully submitted,

LEE & MORSE, P.C.


Eugene M. Lee, Reg. No. 32,039

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LEE & MORSE, P.C.
3141 FAIRVIEW PARK DRIVE, SUITE 500
FALLS CHURCH, VA 22042
703.207.0008 TEL
703.207.0003 FAX

PETITION and
DEPOSIT ACCOUNT CHARGE AUTHORIZATION

This document and any concurrently filed papers are believed to be timely. Should any extension of the term be required, applicant hereby petitions the Director for such extension and requests that any applicable petition fee be charged to Deposit Account No. 50-1645.

If fee payment is enclosed, this amount is believed to be correct. However, the Director is hereby authorized to charge any deficiency or credit any overpayment to Deposit Account No. 50-1645.

Any additional fee(s) necessary to effect the proper and timely filing of the accompanying-papers may also be charged to Deposit Account No. 50-1645.